The impact of identity negotiation on the development of intercultural competence in study abroad contexts

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With the growing recognition of study abroad contexts as one of the fertile research fields for applied linguists, it has become more crucial to investigate pre- and post-study abroad support systems in order to gain insight into how home universities can preliminarily scaffold outgoing students’ socialization into host academic settings and consolidate their acquired academic skills in L2 after returning home. Integrating Dörnyei’s (2009) L2 motivational self system and Byram’s (2008) concept of intercultural competence into the theory of language socialization (Duff, 2010), this study deals with the ways Japanese university students negotiate a sense of self as an L2 learner and develop intercultural competence through an intensive study abroad program, which involves three separate components – a three-month pre-departure course, a five-week overseas English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program, and a three-month post-study course. Focusing on students who undertake a one-academic-year overseas study after experiencing this intensive program, a further investigation is made about how these students are applying their previous study abroad experiences in socializing themselves into overseas discipline-specific courses.

On the basis of a case study of 17 Japanese students who participated in the intensive study abroad program, the data was primarily collected through a questionnaire survey, follow-up interviews, and the students’ weekly reflective journals. A further case study was conducted with two of the participants who subsequently studied as exchange students at an Australian university for one academic year. The findings suggest that students’ development of L2 academic literacy not only plays a significant role in their evaluating various linguistic and cultural contact phenomena in overseas academic contexts but also facilitates managing their own identities and acquiring intercultural competence through the socialization processes.

Keywords: intercultural competence, identity negotiation, L2 academic literacy, language socialization.